

Mariah Carey, and Sir Elton John have held residency performances at the 4,300-seat colosseum. The hotel and casino also provided the backdrop to blockbuster movies.

I commend Caesars Palace for 50 years of exceptional service to the Las Vegas Strip. Caesars Palace has continuously evolved throughout the past five decades to remain a leader on the world famous Las Vegas Strip, and I wish them continued success for years to come.

DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the Senate held another vote on moving to the Defense appropriations bill. This bill was reported from committee by a 30 to nothing vote, and it shows what can be accomplished if we work in a bipartisan manner. Unfortunately, the Senate majority has taken a turn away from bipartisanship since the bill was drafted.

I will speak more about my concerns with this move toward division and divisiveness in a moment. But first let me commend the chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator COCHRAN, for his leadership in producing this bill. He has been open to my proposals, and has also made a courageous stand against attempting to relitigate the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015.

Among the highlights of the bill include investments that strengthen our technology advantage, restore the readiness of the Armed Forces, and stabilize our defense industrial base.

Most importantly, this bill makes a strong statement in favor of defense medical research. It adds \$915 million in addition to the budget request for investigations into new drugs and therapies that could lead to breakthroughs in the treatment of diseases ranging from breast cancer, traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's, prosthetics, and many other fields. This is an increase of 5 percent real growth compared to last year's bill.

The funding in this bill is small compared to the investments at the National Institutes of Health, but the results of defense medical research have touched the lives of countless numbers of servicemembers, their families, and have even spread into the civilian medical community. This funding makes a big impact in people's lives, and I am proud that our commitment to this research continues to grow each year.

The bill also recognizes the threat posed by ISIS. It fully funds the overseas contingency operations account to provide what our servicemembers need in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere in harm's way.

In this way, we disagree strongly with our House counterparts. The House bill provides only a portion of the funds necessary. We believe on a bipartisan basis that there should be no arbitrary cut-off date of funding for this Nation's fight against terrorism.

The U.S. and our allies are working to defeat ISIS on the ground in Iraq and Syria, and dismantle their international terror network. There is real progress on the ground. The President has built a coalition of 66 nations to fight ISIS. The terrorist group has almost half its territory in Iraq, and 20 percent of its territory in Syria. It has lost access to key sources of funds for its activities. The U.S. and its allies have killed tens of thousands of their fighters, as well as over 100 ISIS leaders.

This bill provides \$43.3 billion for DOD to fight Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS, including \$1.78 billion to continue this progress against ISIS by building the capacity of allies in Iraq, Syria, and the broader region.

We also must continue to prevent terrorism here at home through stronger homeland defenses and work with our allies to strengthen theirs—intelligence sharing and all the rest.

We have to have the entire Federal Government in this fight, from the Department of Homeland Security to the FBI, from the State Department to the Treasury Department. It cannot be DOD's fight alone.

People may be asking, since the Defense appropriations bill was approved by a committee vote of 30 to zero in May, why isn't the bill receiving a similar bipartisan vote in July? To find the answer, one need look no further than how the Republican majority has handled funding to combat the Zika virus.

On May 19, the Senate voted overwhelmingly, 68–30, to pass a \$1.1 billion package to respond to the threat of Zika. But in conference, a deal was cut without Democrats at the table that completely undermined the compromise proposal that was supported by the Senate.

There are only two explanations for how a bipartisan deal turned out so badly: maybe the negotiators on behalf of the Senate majority did not do a good job of representing the Senate's position. Or this was a case of legislative rope-a-dope, in which there was never an intention to follow through on a bipartisan compromise.

That brings us to the Defense appropriations bill. After the Senate caved once to unreasonable House proposals on the Zika bill, Democrats have sought assurances that we will have fair outcomes to negotiating other appropriations bills.

That simply means that Democrats should be at the table for conference negotiations, that these budget bills will have fair spending levels, and we avoid poison pills inserted by the House, such as cutting off funding for the fight against ISIL after just 6 months.

Sadly, the Republican majority has bristled at the idea of giving assurances that the fair process used in the Appropriations Committee to produce these budget bills will be allowed to continue.

Last year, when Republicans produced one-sided appropriations bills, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter called these plays a "road to nowhere."

Absent a commitment by the Republican leadership to continue in a spirit of bipartisanship and compromise, it seems they have chosen once again to walk down that same road that leads to gridlock and stalemate.

It is disappointing and disheartening that an appropriations process that began on such a good note has taken a turn for the worse.

The Defense appropriations bill is a good bill. Democrats are simply seeking assurances from the Republican Leadership that the same spirit of compromise and bipartisanship that helped draft the bill will be restored after faith was broken with a one-sided, divisive approach to responding to the Zika virus.

I regret that the Republican leadership cannot give those assurances and therefore are putting an end to appropriations work this summer.

It is my sincere hope that, after the election, both Democrats and Republicans can return to working in good faith to produce a budget bill that includes this very good defense bill, as well as the 11 other appropriations bills that need to be passed before the year is done.

IRAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this month marks the 1-year anniversary of the nuclear deal reached between a number of world powers and Iran.

Let's take a moment to step back and recall where we were when President Obama took office.

Our intelligence community assessed that until 2003, Iran was working toward a nuclear bomb.

The reckless war in Iraq further empowered Iran. The country's hardliners moved forward at great speed building suspicious nuclear infrastructure. These efforts produced large and unsettling quantities of highly enriched uranium that could have been used for a nuclear weapon.

Such a weapon in the hands of the Iranian regime would have been an unacceptable risk to the region, to Israel, and to the world.

This is the mess President Obama inherited when he came to office; yet he pledged that Iran would not obtain a nuclear bomb on his watch.

And that is exactly what he did.

He negotiated a comprehensive deal in which Iran pledged to the world not to build a nuclear bomb and agreed to stringent inspections and terms to ensure that Iran keeps that pledge.

And this historic agreement was accomplished without drawing the United States into another war in the Middle East.

You see, despite all the naysayers and efforts to undermine this deal—including an unprecedented letter signed by most in the majority party to the

hardline Iranian Supreme Leader that aimed to undermine our own President's efforts to negotiate a deal—the agreement is working.

As the International Atomic Energy Agency has documented, Iran has shipped more than 8.5 tons, or 98 percent of its stockpile, of enriched uranium to Russia—enriched uranium that no longer poses a threat for use in a nuclear weapon; disabled more than 12,000 centrifuges used to enrich uranium; poured concrete into the core of a reactor at Arak designed to produce plutonium which can also be used to produce a nuclear weapon; removed all nuclear material from its once-secret nuclear facility at Fordow; and allowed comprehensive ongoing inspection by the IAEA to make sure Iran doesn't cheat.

So, instead of a runaway effort to create the fuel and infrastructure needed to build a nuclear bomb within a few months, Iran's ability to build a nuclear weapon is dramatically disabled.

Its breakout time is at least a year—and any effort to do so would almost certainly be caught quickly by the international community.

And equally important, a breach would make any military action against Iran that much easier for those in the international community to get behind.

As President Obama said earlier this year, the deal effectively “cut off every single path Iran could have used to build a bomb.”

In fact, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon under Prime Minister Netanyahu and harsh critic of diplomacy with Iran recently said that Iran's nuclear program, “has been frozen in light of the deal signed by the world powers and does not constitute an immediate, existential threat for Israel.”

When the nuclear deal was reached last year, I came early to the floor to announce my strong support for this agreement.

I noted that strong countries negotiate with their adversaries and have done so for generations, regardless of who was in the White House at the time, and agreements reached from talking with our enemies have had tremendous benefits to our national security.

The deal with Iran is no different.

Now, I know opponents of the deal, who have spent much of the last year looking for ways to undermine it despite its success, will justify further such efforts by saying Iran's other behavior is problematic.

Well, it is. It was before the nuclear agreement, and it continues to be, whether in Syria or Gaza or Yemen.

Iran continues to repress its own citizens internally, brazenly trying to keep reformers off Iranian election ballots and locking up those who peacefully urge greater freedoms.

But it does those actions without a nuclear weapon.

You see, just as President Kennedy negotiated with the Soviets when they

were threatening possible nuclear war with missiles in Cuba or just as President Nixon began to establish ties with China while it was supplying weapons to the North Koreans who were fighting American soldiers or just as President Reagan negotiated with the Soviet Union even though it was occupying Eastern Europe and fomenting violent revolutions around the world, there are times when such agreements serve our national interests and make the world a somewhat safer place.

This deal with Iran was never about all its genuinely troubling behavior in the region. It was about ending Iran's ability to rapidly or easily make a nuclear bomb.

And that is what it did.

I fully support ongoing efforts to address Iran's ballistic missile program, to halt its support for extremist groups in the region, to forcefully push back on its threats to Israel and other allies in the region.

But these efforts shouldn't be straw men to undermine the nuclear agreement.

And addressing these issues will be far easier without Iran having a nuclear umbrella.

There have been so many decades of mistrust between the United States and Iran.

I myself cannot forget what happened in 1979 when our embassy was seized and more than 60 Americans were held hostage for 444 days. There were mock executions and other inhumane acts. Anyone who is familiar with this story knows the pain these people and their families suffered.

And no one can forget the horrible threats made by some Iranian leaders against the Israeli people or denials of the Holocaust.

Israel has genuine security concerns about Iran. So do I.

But at the end of the day, I believe this agreement is the best way to take one of those concerns—an Iranian nuclear bomb—off the table.

It won't change Iranian behavior overnight, but in the long term, it also has the potential to empower the Iranian moderates—those who want a more open and internationally respected country.

So I want to thank this President and so many of my colleagues here in the Senate who defended this agreement. Quite simply, the dismantling of the Iranian nuclear threat is a remarkable historical achievement.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTINA MULKA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, I want to say a few words about one of my most loyal and reliable aides, Christina Mulka. For nearly a decade, Christina worked in my office, most notably as press secretary and deputy communications director. Later this month, Christina will be moving to Detroit. To say we are going to miss her would be a gross understatement. If you ask my staff, they will tell you

they don't refer to their friend and colleague by her first name. Everyone calls her “Mulka.” There are a lot of Christinas on Capitol Hill, but only one Mulka.

Like many bright young people in Washington, DC, Christina began her career as an intern. In the spring of 2006, I got a call from former Massachusetts Governor and Democratic Presidential candidate—turned college professor—Michael Dukakis. He told me about a student named Christina Mulka at Northeastern University who needed a 6-month internship as part of her co-op program. Internships in my office are never 6 months, but he insisted I give her a chance; and he told me if I did, I wouldn't regret it. Well, 10 years later, he was right.

Not long after Christina's internship ended, I had an opening in my office for a press secretary. Christina was back at Northeastern settling into life as a student. Now, just as internships in my office are never 6 months, press secretaries in my office almost always have a college degree. But just as we did before, we made an exception for Christina—and I hired her before she graduated. She moved back to Washington, DC, and completed her degree while earning a paycheck from the U.S. Senate. It was the second time I made an exception for Christina Mulka. And let me tell you, she didn't disappoint.

For years, Christina served as my on-the-record spokesperson for Illinois media inquiries. Simply put, she had an extraordinary knack for dealing with Illinois reporters. Whenever I wrote an editorial, I could always count on Christina to work diligently to find a newspaper to print it. As many Senate press staffers will tell you, this is no small task. Despite working in Washington, DC, she maintained close connections with Illinois reporters. Every reporter and news outlet felt valued and in the loop because Christina valued everyone. That is who she is. She treated them all the same, big or small. Whether it was Chicago or Springfield, Quincy or Belleville, Carbondale or Mattoon, she truly cared that news outlets throughout Illinois were informed about what was happening in Washington, DC.

Christina worked well with my policy staff to understand the issues. She was always well prepared to promote my priorities, agenda, and ideas to help the people of Illinois. I had such confidence in her that, over time, her portfolio expanded to include many issues that I would list as my top priorities, including tobacco, dietary supplements, for-profit colleges, and the Marketplace Fairness Act.

Let me tell you a story about one of my first memories of Christina. She was staffing me during a round of Illinois TV interviews here in Washington, DC. Opening Day was right around the corner, and a lot of questions were about baseball, specifically the Chicago Cubs. When the interviews were over, she turned to me and apologized for not